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THE IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS OF FIRST YEAR TEACHERS.

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TO DETERMINE BEGINNING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR TEACHING PROBLEMS, A QUESTIONNAIRE WAS SENT TO 282 JUNE 1964 ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY GRADUATES OF SUC BROCKPORT. REPLIES FROM 163 SHOWED A SIGNIFICANTLY FREQUENT RECURRENCE OF CERTAIN TEACHING PROBLEMS. THESE PROBLEMS FELL IN SIX MAJOR CATEGORIES AND WERE RANKED FOR FREQUENCY AS FOLLOWS--(1) METHODS, (2) EVALUATION (OF STUDENTS), (3) DISCIPLINE, (4) PARENT RELATIONS, (5) ROUTINES AND MATERIALS, (6) PERSONAL (MOSTLY LACK OF SELF-CONFIDENCE). OTHER SIMILAR STUDIES SHOWED DISCIPLINE AS A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR. HOWEVER IT IS FELT THAT THERE IS A DISTINCT LACK OF AGREEMENT IN TERMINOLOGY AMONG SUCH STUDIES, MAKING COMPARISON DIFFICULT. IT IS FELT THAT AN INSTRUMENT (FOR FOLLOWING-UP RECENT EDUCATION GRADUATES) SHOULD BE STANDARDIZED. RESULTS OF THE CURRENT STUDY ARE BEING USED TO PLAN SPECIFIC PRESERVICE EXPERIENCES TO WHICH STUDENTS WILL BE EXPOSED IN AN EFFORT TO DETERMINE WHETHER SUCH EXPOSURE WILL ALTER THE NUMBER, INTENSITY, OR KIND OF PROBLEMS PERCEIVED BY 1967 GRADUATES. PRESENTLY EACH OF THE SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS IS BEING BUILT INTO A SPECIAL SIMULATION PROGRAM. PAPER READ AT ANNUAL CONVOCATION ON EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH (6TH, OCT. 19, 1965). (RP)

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THE IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS OF FIRST YEAR TEACHERS

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(The research reported herein was performed pursuant to a contract with the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Education, under the provisions of the Cooperative Research Program.)

Introduction and Statement of Problem

This fall approximately 150,000 teachers entered America's public schools for the first time. NCTEPS, in its desire to be of greater service to the new teacher community, invested one half million dollars in its recent annual conference which took as its theme "The Real World of the Beginning Teacher." It has gone on record supporting additional professional inquiry which may result in solving the problems faced as a beginning teacher.

One method of inquiry is to identify problems perceived by beginning teachers, to analyze them, and to provide mechanics for their possible elimination. This study, which is the initial phase of a U.S. Office of Education project, has as its objective the identification and analysis of perceived problems of beginning teachers at the State University College at Brockport.

In order to determine the problems perceived by Brockport graduates, a questionnaire was devised based upon earlier work done by Dropkin and Taylor,[1] Smiley and Sprague,[2] and Seymour Lemeshow.[3]

The questionnaire contained 117 items categorized into 7 areas as follows: discipline, evaluation, methods, parent relation, personal planning, routine, and materials. An example of an item found in the category "relationships with parents" was "telling parents that their children have problems."

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[1] Stanley Dropkin, & Marvin Taylor. "Perceived problems of beginning teachers and related factors." *Journal of Teacher Education* 14:384-90; December, 1963

[2] Marjorie B. Smiley, & Arthur R. Sprague. *Professional difficulties of beginning elementary school teachers as seen by elementary school principals.* Study No. IV, New York. Office of Institutional Research, Hunter College; November, 1957

[3] Personal Correspondence from Seymour Lemeshow concerning unpublished research

The 117 items were arranged in a random fashion. Respondents were asked to rate each item as either 1) serious, 2) moderate, 3) minor, or 4) no problem. Test-retest reliability of the instrument when used with a graduate class was .96.

The Perceived Problems Inventory, or PPI, was mailed to the 282 June 1964 elementary and secondary graduates of SUC Brockport. One hundred sixty-three replies (or 58 percent of the questionnaires) were received in time for the analysis.

The original 4-point scale was reduced to a 2-point scale to compensate for possible respondent reluctance to admit severity of problems. Results were subjected to chi-square analysis in "problem"—"no problem" categories to determine which items were chosen significantly beyond chance level.

The following table lists problems found significant within the original 7 categories:

PERCEIVED PROBLEMS OF BEGINNING TEACHERS

A. Discipline
   - Having students see relationships between undesirable behavior and consequences
   - Having children maintain quiet while working independently
   - Finding ways to integrate isolated, disliked children in group activities
   - Handling children's aggressive behavior toward one another
   - Handling the constantly disrupting child

B. Evaluation
   - Not knowing how to evaluate my objectives
   - Judging children's progress in terms of my aims and purposes
   - Feeling uncomfortable about giving failing grades
   - Involving pupils in self-evaluation
   - Being able to prepare classroom tests that are valid

C. Methods
   - Involving many of the children in group discussions
   - Getting students to do homework
   - Not knowing what to do with students who finish early
   - Too much stress on grades for motivation
   - Relating the subject meaningfully to children

Not knowing how to deal with reading problems
Having work for some children while I work with other groups or individuals
Introducing a new topic and obtaining high interest
Differentiating instruction among the slow, average, and gifted children in class
Students not willing to work

D. Parent Relation
Discussing with parents their children's achievement
Having trouble with interpreting children's capabilities to parents
Helping a student with a destructive home situation
Getting parents to take an interest in their children's behavior
Telling parents that their children have problems

E. Personal
Lacking enthusiasm for a subject
Being impatient with my students
Feeling nervous when supervised

F. Planning
None

G. Routine and Materials
Needing help in selecting instructional materials
Finding films and filmstrips related to the area being studied
Ordering, securing, and accounting for supplies and materials*
Finding reading materials for readers one or more years below grade level
Having a distaste for grading papers

In the category of "Planning," there were no problems. The six remaining problem categories ranked in order of percentage (obtained by comparing number of significant problems in each category to total number of problems in the category) are as follows:

1. Methods
2. Evaluation
3. Discipline

* Items at .01 level. All others at .001 level.

4. Parent Relations
5. Routines and Materials
6. Personal

Discussion

A review of related literature reveals that although numerous follow-up studies are reported, most are simple surveys so limited in number of respondents involved or procedure followed that they offer little guidance or assurance.

This study, too, has its limitations. The questionnaire employed (PPI) did not contain all possible choices which might be problems of beginning teachers. The number of graduates failing to respond also decreased the study's value. It is entirely possible, for example, that those not responding to the initial request and to a subsequent follow-up request are the teachers who had the most problems.

The results show some similarity to a few more descriptive surveys. For example, all other similar studies [4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9] reveal that discipline is among the most frequently reported problems of beginning teachers.

Following are the problems reported in some of these studies: (Only the first two report the problems in order of difficulty.)

Dropkin

1. Discipline
2. Relations with parents
3. Methods of teaching
4. Evaluation
5. Planning
6. Materials and resources
7. Classroom routines

[4] Dropkin, *op. cit.*
[5] Sam M. Lambert. "Beginning teachers and their education." *Journal of Teacher Education:* 8:347-481, December 1956
[6] Evelyn Piper. "An evaluation of the undergraduate elementary teacher education program at the University of Oregon, based on the opinions of graduates." (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oregon, 1960)
[7] Smiley, *op. cit.*
[8] John B. Stout. "Deficiencies of beginning teachers." *Journal of Teacher Education:* 3:43-46; March, 1952
[9] Herbert W. Wey. "Difficulties of beginning teachers." *School Review:* 59:32-37; January, 1951

Wey

1. Discipline
2. Adjusting to deficiencies in school equipment and materials
3. Adjusting to additional non-teaching responsibilities
4. Providing for individual differences
5. Motivation
6. Keeping records and reports
7. Methods of teaching
8. Relations with superordinates

Piper

1. Diagnosis and remediation of learning difficulties
2. Discipline
3. Evaluation

Lambert

1. Keeping records and reports
2. Finding out about and using special services of the school
3. Understanding school goals
4. Planning for and working with exceptional children
5. Discipline
6. Understanding and using courses of study and curriculum guides

When comparing the results of the studies reported above, it is obvious that lack of agreement exists in terminology, which therefore inhibits generalization. Beyond the fact that all studies report "discipline" as a problem, they also indicate aspects of "methodology" (e.g., motivation planning, remediation, providing for individual differences, etc. . . .) as serious. "Planning," as a distinct category, was not reported as a problem in the current study. In most other respects this study notes somewhat similar findings.

It seems obvious in making the aforementioned comparisons that an instrument should be standardized which could be used by any and all teacher preparation units so that results more easily could be contrasted. The proliferation of techniques and instruments, all presently limited, and the variety of response items therein, make any further generalization or comparison of studies unwarranted.

Results of the current study are being used to plan specific pre-service experiences to which students will be exposed in an effort to determine whether such exposure will alter the number, intensity, or kind of problems perceived by 1967 graduates. Presently each of the 35 significant problems is being simulated and built into a special simulation program.[10]

One of the major obstacles to converting the problems to simulated incidents is in determining what the expression of each problem meant to the respondents. Presently this obstacle is being attacked with the help of classroom teachers and further statistical analysis.

[10] A fifth grade is being simulated to provide a two week pre-student teaching experience in these problem areas for a group of student teachers in the fall of 1966